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PROHIBITION OR TEMPERANCE?

BY L. AMES BROWN

A MEMBER of the International Anti-Alcohol Federation, who declared in a work published a few years ago that the anti-alcohol movement in America is unlike the movement in Europe in that it is not University bred, cannot be held to have uttered an unfair judgment upon the leaders of the movement here. It is a regrettable fact that the more valuable minds in America have been concerned with problems which were deemed more weighty than the problem of drink reform, and that a movement of very important extent has arisen under the dominance of a set of men who do not represent the best minds among us. As evidencing the failure of the prohibition leaders to comprehend the traditions of the people they have sought to lead, I have referred in an earlier paper to the prominence given in the Anti-Saloon League propaganda to the material gain to be anticipated from prohibition, and have commented upon the implicit neglect of the tradition that as a people Americans have girded up their loins and made great sacrifices only on occasions when some spiritual thing was at issue. It is my aim in the present paper to inquire if there are essential differences between prohibition and temperance, and to disclose instances in the history of the United States when the former has seemed to antagonize the other.

The whole lesson of Americanism, as applied to the drink problem, is that our progress has been in the direction of temperance, of self-control, of restraint, instead of prohibition. Misled by their uneducated enthusiasm, some of the prohibitionists are working upon theories of Americanism which do not comprehend that the only prohibition that could comport with our traditions would be one preceded by utter self-control. Perhaps it would not be un-American for peo-

ple who had achieved real temperance to say, "We will make it more difficult for the backsliders and the decadent ones"; but there can be no basis in anything we have done as a people for the expectation that from one year to the next we will decide that, because we are incapable of self-control, we must tie our hands behind us in respect of drink consumption. Voters who have not been convinced sufficiently of the harmful effects of intoxicants to lay aside drinking without pressure from the law, are almost certain not to stand solidly for the enactment or the enforcement of the law which forbids drinking. They may be taught the harmful effect of drinking, taught to restrain themselves as so many Americans are coming to do each year, until in a new era of self-control there would be no need for a Hobson propaganda. "In the long run compulsory prohibition will not prohibit until the public is ready to cease using alcohol, when restriction laws will be superfluous," observed Commissioner Emerson when he began in the present year a crusade of the New York Health Department against drinking.

Temperance is essentially a quality established within one's self, while prohibition is a measure designed to achieve the superficial results of temperance through the exercise of a superior force. Temperance comes through internal growth, while prohibition forces abstinence upon one and is accompanied by the constant danger of rebellion. Thus, we need not be surprised to find, in glancing back over the history of anti-alcohol agitations in the United States, that the prohibitionists have opposed a number of movements of promise in the development of temperance; and we shall be likely to expect the same damaging result from the continuance of the propaganda in the future. The clash which has occurred was inevitable, and inevitably it will recur.

One cannot ignore the bright promise of the Washington Society of pledge-takers, which sprang up in New England a few years before Neal Dow began his advocacy of the Maine liquor law. That society sought to convince men of the moral and physical harmfulness of drinking and to prevail upon them to restrain themselves by the exercise of their individual wills; it opposed any recourse to law, or legal force to compel such restraint. It made headway for a time, prevailing upon 600,000 persons to pledge themselves to abstinence. But it was denounced by the followers of Dow,

and it disintegrated not long before the achievement of his ephemeral victory in New England.

And now consider the great responsibility which the advocates of prohibition have shouldered in opposing movements started in the United States to seek temperance reform by a differentiation between ardent spirits and the less alcoholized beverages. It is an odd coincidence that Dr. Benjamin Rush, whose book, *An Inquiry into The Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Mind and Body*, was the first inspiration for temperance reform in the United States, advocated just such a measure of distinction. What impressed him and caused him to write his book of far-reaching influence was the harm done by ardent liquor, and he would have thought the millennium hastened could he have contrived a measure for substituting a lighter drink for the heavy spirits consumed by the New Englanders of his day. The Dow propagandists had only intemperate disapproval for proposals of such measures of distinction, however, although hard cider was exempted from the Maine law in deference to the attitude of the Maine farmers, and there came a time when beer, light wines and even heavier drinks, including cocktails, were made procurable from State agencies "for the use of invalids."

Dr. Rush and his supporters succeeded in arousing a large section of public opinion to the ills that were being wrought by the drinking of rum and other hard liquors, and, in despite of the attitude of the prohibitionists, there developed in the United States a tendency to abandon the heavy drinks for the lighter ones, which has operated to the inestimable benefit of the nation. As late as 1840 the annual consumption of malt liquors in the United States was only 1.36 gallons per capita, while that of hard liquors was 2.52. Within twenty years the per capita consumption of malt liquors surpassed that of spirits, and since that time there has been a steadily widening divergence between the two. The per capita consumption of hard liquors had decreased in 1913 to 1.5, and that of malt liquors had reached 20.62.

Surely no one will question the wholesomeness of this displacement of the heavier intoxicants by the lighter ones. People everywhere are in agreement that the lighter drinks are infinitely less harmful than the hard ones; and a recent disclosure that some important German scientists are not convinced of the harmfulness of the use of alcohol in small

quantities of course strengthens the position of those who advocate legal measures of differentiation.

In observing the great advances made by the lighter beverages in displacing the heavier ones, we cannot disregard the fact that this development has been retarded in the prohibition States. The object of State prohibition, of course, has been to restrain drinking, for there never was any thought that, with the operation of the Federal interstate commerce laws, it could be made impossible for the people of the prohibition States to secure any drink at all. Mr. Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, observes:

An outstanding accomplishment of the prohibition laws has been that the people in the sections where they were operative were prevented from acquiring the taste for lighter beverages, such as beer, in preference to whiskeys. One of the wholesome signs in the modern industrial life of the country has been the surprising extent to which light beer has displaced the more ardent beverages. The people in the prohibition States would have been much better off if their laws had not prevented them from keeping abreast of this national tendency.

Mr. Gompers pointed out, from practical observation of Maine conditions, that it was more difficult to import beer than other alcoholics from outside the State because of its greater bulk, and that for the same reason the illicit dispensers of beverages found it impracticable to deal in the lighter ones. In the Southern prohibition States, in sections where the prohibition law is not supported by public sentiment, the people resort to illicit distillers, as the Commissioners of Internal Revenue have shown repeatedly. Of course, the only liquor produced by these distillers is the dangerous stuff manufactured from corn and other grain. This would appear to indicate that prohibition has been a hindrance to the development of a comparative temperance among the people of the prohibition States.

The most recent specific clash between the prohibitionists and those who favor a measure of distinction between the light and heavy drinks has occurred in the present Anti-Saloon League fight in New York State. A measure which has been introduced in the legislature at Albany would prohibit the manufacture or sale of liquor containing more than ten per cent. of alcohol. The bill is advocated by the newspapers owned by Mr. Hearst. The measure has been

denounced by the State Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League as "a piece of brewers' defensive tactics," who adds sententiously that "the temperance movement has gone too far to be cajoled by buncombe into a brewers' blind alley." In replying to an editorial in favor of the so-called Hearst measure, the State Superintendent had this to say:

The above is either a piece of stupid, ignorant falsehood, or it is a piece of cunning, willful falsehood, and Mr. Hearst spends money enough to be able to hire men who are not stupid. About every intelligent person except the innocent, credulous, guileless, unsophisticated individuals who make up the staff of Mr. Hearst's paper, knows that the thing that makes "whiskies, brandies, and other vicious alcoholic beverages" dangerous, is *alcohol*, and that alcohol is the thing for which people drink beer and wine. Further, practically everybody except those spotless souls above indicated, knows that while there is a larger percentage of alcohol in whiskey than in beer, the average drink of beer is very much larger than the drink of whiskey, and that a drink of beer contains about as large an actual quantity of alcohol as the ordinary drink of whiskey, the only difference being that it is more diluted.

Throughout the history of the prohibition movement, its protagonists have been dogmatic in insisting that other means of drink reform were inadequate, or the products of insincerity. In many cases proposers of alternative plans have been assailed as vigorously as were the special interests opposing prohibition. The student of drink reform should regret that the prohibitionists have taken this attitude. Some good would surely have been accomplished by the support of certain of these temperance movements, and it is difficult to see how the acceptance of this benefit would have been harmful to the ultimate destiny of drink reform. The experience of the American Navy until the time of Secretary Daniels' "dry navy order" demonstrated the comparative efficacy of a distinction between light and heavy drinks as a temperate measure. A measure that works so well in the American Navy ought to have the serious consideration of temperance reformers everywhere. We are forced to conclude, however, that these regrets are as vain today as they would have been at any time in the country's history, and to concede the good sense of this utterance of Senator John Sharp Williams, delivered in a speech in the Senate a year ago:

If I had my way—and I have not and I never expect to have it;

both extremes would equally deery me and put me out on every side—I would absolutely forbid the sale and the manufacture of distilled liquors because they are a poison, while permitting the free sale, subject only to ordinary taxes, of pure wines and pure malt liquors. In so far as distilled liquors are concerned, being certainly not helpful to anybody in the long run, nor for any great time in the short run even, except under very exceptional circumstances, I would forbid their sale and manufacture, but I would permit pure beer and pure wine to be sold as freely as bread. As Thomas Jefferson said years and years ago, “if you substitute them for whiskey and for distilled liquors you would have no drunkenness.” You might as well shoot peas at the rock of Gibraltar, however, as to bring into this great controversy a midway opinion like that. Both sides would agree only upon one thing, and that would be to carry me out and crucify me.

Clearly then, the movement whose political instrumentality is the Anti-Saloon League was in its origin a movement against the saloon and not for prohibition. It is noteworthy from the name of the organization that it is an “anti-saloon” league and not a prohibition league. An examination of its history, as well as the fundamental purposes of its organization, will bear out this estimate.

The American saloon as an institution has shown itself to be an obstacle in the way of the moral and civic development of the people. Its viciousness as an institution lies in the fact that it has not been content to supply an economic need, but has sought vigorously to create an additional need for the goods it dispensed. The hurt that has been done by it to the young men as a class, the working men as a class, and the uneducated voters as a class, is incalculable.

It was the sentiment against the saloon—a sentiment wholly American and praiseworthy—which produced the movement upon which the Hobson propaganda now has been saddled. The damage which the saloon had done had made enemies for it and these enemies banded together into a war of extermination. The first decade of the Anti-Saloon League’s activities after its organization at Oberlin, Ohio, in 1893, consisted of activities against the saloon, against the vicious practices in which the saloons were permitted to engage in certain States, and the thought of nation-wide prohibition was not suggested widely among the League’s leaders. Then the warfare which had been confined to local option elections and contests in State legislatures for better regulatory measures was extended into a campaign for State-

wide prohibition in many of the States. In this period the Anti-Saloon League remained absolutely true to its traditions, for the campaign it had undertaken was entirely an anti-saloon movement. The State-wide prohibition measures it advocated really proposed to do little more than abolish the saloon. Opportunity remained for citizens of the prohibition States to import liquors legally and in any quantity they desired.

In this period between 1905 and 1915, when the South adopted prohibition, it was the sentiment against the saloon which was entirely responsible for the outcome of the referendums in these States. The people of North Carolina, for instance, were bent on doing away with the barrooms, where the negro population was permitted to buy the cheap whiskey which was so productive of crime.

The aim to remove the saloon and its harmful influence from American life has merged into the aim to prevent practically all drinking in the United States. The change in the campaign, made when the Anti-Saloon League took up the nation-wide prohibition idea in 1909, is readily discernible. In the first place, it has been the intention of the League not to prevent all drinking, but to drive out of existence the institution for selling intoxicants and to remove the obstacles it placed in the way of temperance. No suggestion had been tolerated theretofore even among the anti-saloon leaders that an effort be made to prevent all Americans from drinking. In the latter phase, however, the organization has given secondary consideration only to the formerly primary purposes of its existence, and the propaganda for nation-wide prohibition of the Hobson brand is now the chief aim and interest of the Anti-Saloon League.

The more enlightened representatives of the liquor interests make no effort to condone the wrongs for which the saloons are responsible. In a recent communication to the editor of the *New York Times*, Mr. Hugh F. Fox, Secretary of the American Brewers' Association, said:

The brewers are keenly alive to the evils which have been allowed to attach themselves to the saloon business, and they are frank to admit in some cases that they themselves are responsible for these evils because of the financial backing they have given to men who are not qualified to run a saloon. But their efforts to establish a thoroughly sound license system have hitherto met with very little encouragement on the part of the authorities, and with absolutely no

co-operation on the part of the Anti-Saloon League, or any of the so-called "temperance organizations."

Rev. E. C. Dinwiddie, Legislative Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League, to whose attention I called this indictment, freely admitted its justice. He said the Anti-Saloon League had not co-operated and would not co-operate with the brewers' organizations in the manner referred to, because the League was convinced of the latter's insincerity.

In the light of a clearer understanding of the manner in which the prohibition movement was evolved from the anti-saloon movement, one observes interesting questions as to the future of the Anti-Saloon League. It is evident that the Anti-Saloon League has staked its all upon the issue of nation-wide prohibition, and it is questionable whether the prestige of that organization could survive an extensive repudiation of the nation-wide prohibition idea by the people of the country. Such a repudiation may or may not occur, but one thing is certain: Regardless of the fate of the prohibition movement, the war against the saloon will go on. This movement, unlike that for prohibition, is typically American, consonant with the traditions of American progress and the principles evolved out of the growth of the people. Its appeal to the people of the United States is stronger today than at any previous time in the history of the country. Its service to the cause of temperance and of self-control is just as direct and evident as anything could be. It is the great unconscious force behind the nation-wide prohibition movement. If the time comes when those who are asserting this force wake up to the fact that they are giving their energies to a movement somewhat different from that which originally inspired them, perhaps there will be a diminution of the power of the prohibition movement.

These things bring us within the realm of speculation, however, where opinions must be relied upon. The facts we have developed are these: First, that America, if she follows the principles which have animated her growth, will aspire toward temperance and self-control in drinking as in all things, and that self-control and voluntary relinquishment of the drink habit will precede the adoption of measures which make all drinking impossible. Second, the war against the saloon will continue with brightening promise of success, because it comports with this national tendency just outlined.

L. AMES BROWN.